

March 19, 1997

Dr. Richard Foley
Dean
Faculty of Arts and Science
Rutgers University
77 Hamilton Street
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

Dear Dean Foley:

It has come to our attention that The Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department of Rutgers University is considering a name change, in particular the dropping of the Puerto Rican reference from the name. As an organization whose mission is the educational and leadership development of the Puerto Rican/Latino children, ASPIRA finds this course of action to be a matter of serious concern.

Historically, the Puerto Rican community has been in the forefront of many struggles to improve the quality of life of all ethnic groups. It still maintains the highest population rate of any Latino group in the state of New Jersey. It is also the same group that reports the highest poverty rate and one of the highest school dropout rates. During its 35 year existence, ASPIRA has found that in order for inner city children to succeed academically they must be exposed to culturally enhanced programs that identify and reaffirm their existence. Thus, the creation of the Puerto Rican Studies Department was established some 27 years ago.

As you are aware, the Department has become quite inclusive in providing courses about Dominicans and Cubans. Thus, the historical and current experience of these two groups is offered through courses in the Department. If we are not mistaken, the University does have a Latin American Studies Department, whose curriculum focus on the historical realities of the Central and South American experience. Is it not possible that this Department could also include in its curriculum, courses that highlight the current Latino experience of Central and South Americans?

We are questioning the reasons why the Department is considering a change in its name. We would rather see a Department that engages itself to conducting quality research about the Puerto Rican community in New Jersey. The Department has not made a visible attempt to provide the community with any scholarly research about Puerto Ricans or Latinos in New Jersey in the recent years. Has the Department lost the focus of its mission?

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is very much opposed to any name change for the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department. Clearly, there is an issue of identity and respect for the effort of one group, who had the vision and foresight to diversify the academic offerings at Rutgers University more than 2 decades ago. We urge you to not consider a name change for this department. A number of discussions still must occur that examine the ramifications and the reasons why a name change is being considered.

On behalf of ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey, I thank you for your attention and response to this matter.

Sincerely,

Roberto Del Rios
Executive Director